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Chinese fiction in Taiwan

by

Joanne W. Chou

A Thesis Submitted to the  
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy

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Ames, Iowa

1979

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
BIBLIOGRAPHY	15
THE AWAKENING by Ou-yang Tzu	16
THE END OF AN AMERICAN DREAM by Pai Hseng-yung	33
NIXON'S PRESS CORPS by Chen Jo-hsi	42

## INTRODUCTION

The approach of Western scholars to Chinese literature has never been very fruitful. As the literary temper of a time is the result of a historical development and social conditions, it is understandable that the historical and cultural gap between the West and the Orient should create great difficulty for the Western scholars in their study of Chinese literature. Although the preoccupation of the twentieth century with highly developed science and technology has narrowed the gap, the cultural exchange in China is one-sided. In other words, since the beginning of this century the Chinese have tried their best to import as much science and technology as possible. But for the world scholars who do not understand Chinese, there are still very few good translations of Chinese literary masterpieces available.

In the same atmosphere Taiwan has absorbed Western influence intensely on all levels in the past thirty years. Under these circumstances, the effort of Taiwanese writers to search for an ideal and a mode of life that can successfully combine both Chinese culture and Western technology seems particularly meaningful. The three short stories I translated here are examples of this kind of endeavor.

Since 1949 much Chinese fiction has been produced. Most of the better pieces of fiction have recently been translated into English. Therefore, in my selection I have avoided translating the ones that have already been introduced to the Western world and the ones whose themes or spirit do not represent this generation of the Chinese in Taiwan. Though these stories may not necessarily be the best works of the writers, yet

they are the works of present stage of Chinese fiction in terms of the development of Chinese narrative art. To understand better the values of these short stories, the following brief sketch of the history of Chinese fiction is necessary.

The term for fiction in Chinese is "hsiao-shuo," which means literally "small talk." It was originally a term for stories collected from the talk of the streets, or legends and fables which had no historical basis; it gave a connotation of vulgarity and triviality. Therefore, it was disdained by the literati and belonged to a minor tradition rather than to the central elite culture of historiography, philosophical prose, and lyric verse.

Though Chinese fiction was counter to the Confucian philosophy and nothing but some scattered records of gossip and foolish superstition in the beginning, it slowly matured through some major changes to become a formal and dominant genre in a span of more than two thousand years.

In the early history of Chinese fiction its definition was vague and varied with different people. The lines between historiography and fiction were very hard to draw. Even the major resources for traditional Chinese fiction, the ancient myths, are only some simple notes scattered in the early historical writings. Generally, scholars of Chinese literature attempt to seek roots of Chinese fiction in the "chih-kuai"<sup>1</sup> of the

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<sup>1</sup>"Chih-kuai" means something like "describing anomalies."

Six Dynasties (A.D. 420-589) because of its more detailed narration.<sup>2</sup> As far as the subject matter is concerned, tales of gods, demons, and the supernatural were the only type of stories prevalent before the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907).

During the Tang period the art of fiction underwent an important change as a result of oral storytelling. This is remarkable because tales used to be written in the classical-styled language and were thus regarded as an aristocratic entertainment for a comparatively small number of well-educated people. The practice of oral storytelling thus made it possible for more common people to enjoy the art and sowed the seeds for the later development of vernacular fiction. Furthermore, to attract the audience the storytellers had to heighten the art of fiction from the traditional monotonous sketches to more polished narration and elaborated plots. By this time writers had started writing fiction seriously. They took pains to embellish the old tales as well as to create some complicated, fascinating romances which became widely popular among the common people.

The prompt-scripts of these storytellers developed into a form of written stories in the Sung Dynasty (A.D. 960-1279). Hence the vernacular tales were born, and fiction in imitation of the "prompt-scripts" style became popular till the beginning of the twentieth century.

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth J. Dewoskin, "The Six Dynasties Chih-kuai and the Birth of Fiction," Chinese Narrative, edited by Andrew H. Plaks, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 23.

Yet it was not until the Ming Dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644) that the art of Chinese fiction finally matured to produce a number of full-length novels and thereafter became the dominant genre of Chinese literature. Besides writing traditional tales of the supernatural, the early Ming Dynasty writers worked out a type of historical novel. Thus the tales fall naturally into two major categories: wars between gods and demons, and human affairs. Though most of them were well-known traditional folk lores, they were organized in such fine structure with sophisticated skill of emphasis, contrast and suspense that they began to appeal to the audience again. With more exuberant imagination the writers of the Ching Dynasty (A.D. 1645-1911) adopted the same trend of structuring to create some excellent full length novels on human affairs. The prevalent structural pattern of the full length novel in China was a unique design in which a story consisted of many chapters, with each chapter being an independent unit of connected incidents. These little units were linked together by the creation of suspense at the end of each chapter and the interrelation of episodes and characters. This sophisticated structuring is a great innovation in the development of traditional Chinese fiction.

Therefore, unbound from the old manner of reporting historical events, fiction of this period was enriched with varieties of allegories, satires, romances, and adventures. In such atmosphere a number of the greatest masterpieces in the history of Chinese fiction were produced. Traditional Chinese fiction thus reached its summit and soon gave way to the burgeoning of modern fiction. For the discussion of this change

we have to take a quick look at the Western influence on modern Chinese history.

The serious influx of Western civilization happened as early as the sixteenth century, but the Chinese did not feel the urgent need for modernization till the outbreak of the Opium War in 1839. Since then the increasing military and economic aggression by foreign powers enhanced the sense of necessity to reform on all levels. Representing the success of the political revolution, the establishment of the Republic in 1911 was the first accomplishment in answer to the national desire for modernization.

The literary revolution was initiated by an article appearing in a popular journal New Youth in 1917.<sup>3</sup> In the article Hu Shih, the author as well as one of the most enthusiastic supporters of reform, advocated a movement to modernize literature. Most leading contemporary intellectuals responded immediately to the summons, and the literary reform was well underway with the burst of the May Fourth Movement in 1919. The first as well as the most influential result of this movement was the adoption of vernacular Chinese as the national medium of communication,<sup>4</sup> which caused Chinese literature to deviate radically from its traditional

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<sup>3</sup>C. T. Hsia, A History of Modern Chinese Fiction, 1917-1957, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p.3.

<sup>4</sup>The old-styled writing language prevalent before this change was too literary, strict, and formal for the mass.



course.

Since the literary revolution the preeminence of fiction among all Chinese literary forms is well acknowledged, though the shape and spirit of modern Chinese fiction has differed greatly from that of traditional fiction in the way that Chinese fiction has been worked more and more to fit the Western mode of fiction. Two major factors underlying the phenomenon are worth noting. First is the advantage of fiction to adopt modern vernacular Chinese comfortably. As mentioned above, fiction is the only genre of Chinese literature that adopted plain speech as early as the fourteenth century, thus laying the foundation for the language of modern fiction. In his article Hu Shih recommended that vernacular Chinese take the place of the old-styled language, and this suggestion was widely adopted. Fiction was thus able to free itself promptly from the bond of the archaic, strict literary form and replaced its language with the complete colloquial, modern vernacular Chinese without any difficulty.

The second important factor is the prevalence of translations of Western fiction since the latter half of the nineteenth century. The trend became even more widespread in the years following the May Fourth Movement of 1919. As a result, the Chinese writers could not fail to be excited by the sharper style of narrative techniques and the modern modes of structuring. With the adoption of these new writing skills they hoped to explore human problems of modern times rather than to repeat the old tales of the supernatural or the traditional anecdotes. Therefore, social problems, the search for identity, and the revolt

against convention mark the emphasis of modern Chinese fiction.

The political and social disorder during the years of World War II and the following civil war nearly prevented modern Chinese fiction from further development. The communist takeover of mainland China since 1949 added to the drastic social as well as cultural upheavals. More than that, the communists have forbidden all forms of literary expressions, and writings exist only in the form of political propaganda. Thus the progress of the modern literary movement has been suspended in Communist China. For the continuous development of modern Chinese literature we have to turn to the writers in Taiwan.

With almost none of the eminent writers of the May Fourth Movement coming across the Straits to Taiwan, the early nostalgic stories of those who withdrew with the Nationalist Government to the island around 1949 became dominant. These writers, most of whom were servicemen, have transfigured in their fiction nostalgia for their families they had left behind and the hardships of war and discover they had gone through for the mainland. This type of stories kept repeating the same feelings and fighting experiences and soon deteriorated.

The reincarnation of modern Chinese literature did not gain full strength in Taiwan till the beginning of the 1960's when the island was able to maintain stability and prosper after a decade of difficulty in reestablishment. Thus with 1960 as the year of division, the development of fictional writing in Taiwan has come into a new period when the works of the young generation who were brought up on the island have emerged in quantities. They share a common, intensified interest

in their milieu and the problems facing the industrial transformation of the politically isolated island. Among the motivating and guiding forces to promote the development of modern Taiwanese fiction, the journal Modern Literature has made the greatest contribution and deserves special notice.

Modern Literature was a bi-monthly founded by four English majors at National Taiwan University, aiming at encouraging creative writings and introducing modern Western literature into the Taiwanese society which was not very familiar with the trend of world literature then. The translations of Kafka, Thomas Mann, James Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, Faulkner, and introductory articles that appeared in the journal stimulated readers' interest in imitating the modern art of Western fiction and re-examing classical Chinese literature with modern analytic methods. All the Taiwanese writers and poets who emerged in the 1960's, more or less, owe some credit to the journal which has stimulated and directed their creative power; they have adopted the up-to-date techniques of narrations and structuring to delve into the conflicts between the new and the old systems, the agricultural and industrial patterns of living, and the difficult situation of political isolation of Taiwan. Scholars in the field of classical Chinese literature have also made use of the new, sharper tools for analyzing in the hope of finding more meaningful values in the traditional tales, romances, and historical novels.

The tremendous contribution of Modern Literature to the development of modern Chinese fiction suggests the important fact that the second generation of modern China, separated from the land where the root of

Chinese culture is, has felt the impetus to accommodate Chinese literature to the modern trend of world literature as those intellectuals of the May Fourth Movement had forty years ago. It is with the same enthusiasm the young Taiwanese writers have expected to work out a successful combination embodying both Chinese culture and Western art of fiction.

The short stories I selected to translate here are works by three of the four founders of Modern Literature. As I mentioned above, these are not their representative works but serve as good examples of the skill and perspective of modern Chinese fiction in Taiwan.

"The Awakening" is written by Ou-yang Tzu, the pen name of Huang Chih-huei. Born in 1939 in Japan to parents from Taiwan, she was a vigorous member of the Modern Literature group. After doing her advanced study in the International Writing Program at the University of Iowa, she has settled down with her family in Texas.

Ou-yang Tzu has been noted in Taiwanese society for her skill in psychological exposure of her characters. The stress of her works is founded on the psychic plane of the characters rather than the physical appearance of either the characters or the backgrounds. Beyond the traditional way of facial description, she pierces into the inner personalities and touches the true motives of her characters. Her academic background is also reflected in her practice of Aristotle's "three Unities" theory and the plain, realistic language in her short stories.

"The Awakening" concerns a mother-son relationship, one of the common themes in traditional Chinese fiction. Ou-yang Tzu has perceived the conflict from a psychological perspective and led her readers to a

better understanding of the true woman behind the face of a kind mother. The realistic narration reveals that the mother has cherished and safeguarded her son because she has treated him as part of her property. She is stunned by the shock of recognition when she realizes that her son is as ordinary an individual as most people are. The disillusionment is presented with a dramatic sense of irony.

As in most of her short stories, the remarkable thing about this story is the way she presents the old relationship between mother and son. Ou-yang breaks the traditional image of kind mother and treats her as any ordinary individual. The realistic language helps to expose more objectively the psychological progress of the mother. Basically "The Awakening" serves as a good example of the influence of modern psychological narration, though there may be some defects in the story.

The author of the second short story, "The End of an American Dream," is Pai Hseng-yung, the major figure of the Modern Literature group. Born in 1937 to a well-to-do family in mainland China, he was brought up and educated in Taiwan. He also attended the University of Iowa for his advanced study in The International Writing Program after he obtained his Bachelor's degree in English from National Taiwan University. He is an assistant professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

Pai Hseng-yung is one of the most accomplished of modern Chinese writers. With painstaking realism he offers a deep insight into Chinese life and character. Combining Western and Chinese techniques of fiction, he delves into the conflicts between the present and the past Chinese

societies. Therefore, his short stories serve as a miniature of modern Chinese history. His works are collected in two anthologies, People in Taipei and The New Yorkers, marking the two major social phenomena in modern Taiwanese life.

With his father being an illustrious general of the Nationalist Army, Pai has been able to witness how the older generation, once rich and powerful, has reacted to their life in exile in Taipei. They appear in the stories of People in Taipei. Then as he studied abroad, he had the opportunity to perceive the life of the Chinese students in their spiritual exile in the United States. "The End of an American Dream" is one of the stories of The New Yorkers.

"The End of an American Dream" depicts a daughter who, bearing her mother's expectation but failing to cope with the academic demands in the United States, has degenerated to becoming a prostitute. This story reflects the author's academic background in Western literature in its adoption of epistolary style and a highly realistic manner, which are not seen in traditional Chinese fiction. The short story successfully presents a social defect underlying the prevalent attitude in the Taiwanese society that to study abroad has almost become a vogue. Out of vanity and lack of confidence in the political situation of Taiwan, many parents have tried to make it possible for their children to study in the United States, the most wealthy and powerful country in the world. But the Chinese students do not all overcome the cultural gap with ease to develop their full talent. Besides, the pressure of family expectation is so strong that an unsuccessful

student would hate to disappoint them with the truth of his academic failure. Thus, to support their families with a vain illusion, they have to stay and earn their living in sordid ways.

"The End of an American Dream" exhibits the degenerate life the Chinese girl has led after she failed school in a lucid, realistic style in which the author's personal comment is not involved. Pai Hseng-yung presents the social defect in such an objective manner that he has gained the reputation as the best Chinese writer of realism.

If rich life experience is one of the essentials for the creative of fiction, none of the modern Chinese writers is more qualified in that sense than the author of "Nixon's Press Corps," Chen Jo-hsi. Born in 1938 in Taiwan, she received her Bachelor's degree in English from National Taiwan University and her Master's degree from Johns Hopkins. During the years when she and her husband were studying in the U.S.A., they became so interested in communism that finally in 1966 they went to live in Communist China so as to put their ideal into practice. After seven years they came back to the free world disillusioned and have settled down in Canada.

With a proletarian background, Chen Jo-hsi has shown great interest in the people of the lower class in Taiwanese society. But her early works, showing an excessive use of Western narrative skill manifest her defect of sentimentalism. Her seven-year stay in Red China becomes a watershed in her career as a writer. During this period she did not produce any work because of the strict communist life pattern, but the disillusionment of her political ideal and her miserable experience

in the communist society serve as a kind of purgation to her soul as well as to her writing skill. Thus her later works exhibit a deeper insight into life and more matured skill in narration and structuring. In informing the free world of the life in Red China, she deliberately adopts a reporting manner and realistic narrative style to tell the life under communist control plainly, truthfully and without rancor so as to avoid the suspicion of political propaganda. "Nixon's Press Corps" is an example of her later works.

"Nixon's Press Corps" concerns a teacher who has gone back to mainland China from the United States and happened to witness people's life that was arbitrarily disturbed because of the change of the communist policy to be on friendly terms with Nixon. In this short story Chen Jo-hsi has abandoned her earlier habit of using complicated narrative skills, but adopts the first person, realistic manner to report Nixon's visit to China from a common teacher's point of view.

The Chinese in Taiwan care about the development of Communist China more than any other people in the world. There is always a hope and belief in their mind that one day the two parts of China will be united together again. With much concern about the welfare of their fellow people in Red China, they are always eager to glean news about their life. Yet literature as we know it is not allowed in Communist China. Under this circumstance Chen Jo-hsi's works, which are not political propaganda but truthful reports of that closed society, seem particularly meaningful and significant both in literature and in history, though her works have not gained the notice that they deserve



in the United States.

The three short stories, which are examples of modern fiction by the young generation in Taiwan, are significant in the sense that the authors have endeavored to continue the literary modernization movement. More than that, being cut off from the mainland where the root of Chinese culture is, the young Taiwanese writers have no way to inherit or imitate the writers of the May Fourth Movement, but out of the same concern for the future of Chinese literature, these young writers have taken pains to cultivate the field of modern Chinese literature exactly the same as the older writers did a generation ago. The literary products of this generation are a great achievement in comparison with some of the works of the May Fourth Movement of 1919 in the way modern Taiwanese fiction has matured to adopt Western narrative skill without awkwardness and to avoid sentimentalism and melodrama. Modern Chinese fiction has moved from romanticism to realism. And the great value of Taiwanese fiction can also be seen in its continuous development of modern Chinese fiction when most fiction in Red China has degenerated into stock formula and political propaganda.

The purpose of this translation is to propose to the Western scholars that there are very many people working very hard to go through this transition period and trying to grope for a way to combine successfully Western narrative skills and Chinese spirit. Their works would seem much more meaningful if we judge them from this perspective.

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## THE AWAKENING

Tun-chih heard the door bell ring while making tea in the kitchen after supper. She did not answer the door because she knew that Ming-shen would. The tea being ready, Tun-chih poured it into two cups and went from the kitchen to the living room. She placed the cup in her right hand on the end table beside the sofa, then went to her son's room with the other cup of tea.

Ming-shen sat at his desk, reading a letter attentively. He did not hear his mother enter the room. She walked up quietly behind him, and glanced at the letter in his hands. She recognized the handwriting immediately, and her eyes fell on a line which read: "That day in New Park, I told you everything...."

Suddenly Ming-shen felt the presence of someone behind him. She knew it must have been so because at that particular moment he changed his position. He shrugged, laid down the letter, and with one hand casually covered it. Then he raised his head and frowned, acting as if he had been in deep contemplation.

She put the tea at the corner of the desk. At this moment he turned to her, pretending that he had just realized that she was in the room. He grinned at her.

"Thank you, Mom," he said.

"Was it the mailman?" Tun-chih asked.

He nodded.

"Special delivery?"

"Yeh."

She stood there for a moment, with no intention to leave right away. Then walking over to the window, she stood looking out at the darkening sky. She hoped that he would say something about the letter first; yet for several minutes there was just silence. She then heard the sound of the drawer opening and closing. By the time she turned around, the letter was no longer on the desk.

"From your friend?" she asked, pretending that she had no idea at all.

He did not answer but stood up and went to the closet to take out his violin.

"From your friend?" Tun-chih repeated.

He glanced at her; there seemed to be anger hidden in his look.

"Kei-yuen!" he said shortly and began playing his violin.

She walked out of his room, sat down in the living room, and listened to him playing as she sipped the tea. His playing, with constant stops, was really not good.

"It's like this again," Tun-chih thought to herself. "How could he expect to improve when he always waits till the last couple of hours before the lesson to start practicing." Mr. Ma was well known for his ill temper; she just hoped that Ming-shen would not make him angry.

At 7:45 p.m. Ming-shen walked out of his room holding his violin and hastily put on his jacket. He left for his music lesson without saying good-bye to her or even taking a look at her.

As soon as he left, she went into his room, sat down at his desk, and opened his right-hand drawer. It was a mess, full of pieces of paper,

used pens and pencils. She searched very thoroughly but could not find the letter anywhere. Finally she gave up, closed the drawer, and tried the left-hand one. But of course, it was locked. She believed that the letter was either in this locked drawer or taken away with him when he left.

She recognized the various handwriting styles of all of his friends who wrote to him. He had the habit of keeping his old letters, storing them in a bundle in the right-hand drawer. This enabled her to read them as she pleased. She always did that when he was not at home, though it never occurred to her that this might be wrong or that he might care. But, one day several weeks ago, when she opened the drawer again, she found that all the letters were gone. She deduced that he had locked them up in the other drawer.

Tun-chih felt a wave of vexation come over her. That Kei-yuen was really a pretentious girl. Though Tun-chih had met her only twice, she could tell that she was one of those girls who like to have their way in everything. More than that, she seemed able to get everything she wanted. She and Ming-shen were both sophomores at National Taiwan University; he majored in history, and she in philosophy. More than ten of the letters that he kept were from Kei-yuen. It was true that she had nice handwriting, but her paragraphs of philosophic ideas in all those letters were disgusting to Tun-chih.

Recalling the line she had just seen in the letter, she wondered what the girl had said to him in New Park. Why did he not mention that he had been there lately? Imagining that there might be many other things

about him she did not know, Tun-chih felt distressed.

Looking up, she suddenly fixed her eyes upon an old picture on the wall. This picture had been there for so many years that she almost forgot its existence. It was an old picture. Ming-shen was only about three when it was taken, and Hung-nien looked young and handsome. Of all the family pictures, this was the one that turned out to be the most satisfactory to her. So she had had it framed and hung it in Ming-shen's room after Hung-nien died.

She had not thought of Hung-nien for a long time. It had been nine years since he died of pneumonia, but she still had not forgiven him. She could not forgive him for making her disappointed with love, and with life. Her parents were against their marriage in the beginning due to the fact that the two families were not of equal standing. In spite of the opposition she married him, with complete faith in the power of love to overcome everything. Yet one day during the fourth year of their marriage she walked into the storage room and found him making love to a maid. This shock had changed her whole life. Afterwards Hung-nien had repeatedly begged for her forgiveness, but she refused and made him understand that she could never forgive him.

After the incident Tun-chih became silent and withdrawn, trying her best to keep a distance from him. She no longer enjoyed their sex life. She tolerated his touch only because she understood it to be an inevitable duty of a wife. Yet every time after they had sex, she despised him, but despised herself even more, regarding herself as low and cheap as a prostitute.

Nevertheless, she always had a comfort--her only son Ming-shen, who had revived her and given her a new life. He was the only one in the world who belonged to her and needed her.

Tun-chih sighed and withdrew her eye from the picture. She had been very depressed recently, feeling as if something heavy were on her shoulders that made her feel very tired. "Maybe I have really aged," she thought with despair. Aged--what a horrible word. Tun-chih was afraid of getting old because Ming-shen was still too young, she believed, to do without her. Oh, how much concern she had for him! She had to protect him from falling into life's various traps. And Kei-yuen, this pompous girl, kept showing off her philosophic ideas to win his heart and even mailed letters by special delivery to gain his affection. What did she say to him in New Park? Why did she keep on pursuing him? "Ah, it is not hard to understand at all--this shameless girl has been trying to steal my son from me," she thought, feeling anger rising in her bosom. "That's it, she's been trying to steal my son."

Apparently Kei-yuen's intrigue had already been partly successful. If it were not so, why should Ming-shen have to cover the letter with his hand? And why did he hide it in a place where she could not find it?

About six months ago on his nineteenth birthday, Ming-shen invited more than ten friends over. That was the first time Tun-chih had seen Kei-yuen. She was not very pretty, but her smooth, black long hair made her stand out in the crowd. Besides, she had a kind of superior, proud disposition as if she had never failed. Tun-chih felt very much irritated when she saw her help to pour tea and serve the birthday cake as if

she had been the hostess. Ming-shen had a picture taken that day in which she stood next to him with a self-confident smile.

The second time Tun-chih saw her was about two months ago. Ming-shen had invited a group of friends home for a snack after mountain climbing. Kei-yuen dressed like a boy in a pair of jeans. She was the only girl among them. Tun-chih could not help pitying her parents. She wondered if they knew that their daughter was hanging around shamelessly with men.

Tun-chih had noticed that for some reason Ming-shen had recently become quiet and absent-minded. She surmised that it might have something to do with that girl. Certainly he knew that his mother did not approve of her. She had never tried to keep this hidden from him. But, would he care? Was it because of this reason that he became quiet and withdrawn? If so, this would be a bit serious. The more she thought about it, the more she believed that his change must have something to do with the girl. She remembered when, a few days ago, she had asked about Kei-yuen, he just muttered something under his breath and changed the subject.

The clock read 8:30. She stood up, pushed the chair under the desk, and left the room. A few minutes later she returned with clean sheets and pillow cases to change his bed. The first few years of her marriage suddenly came to her mind then. The three of them lived in a Japanese-styled house and slept in the same room under the same mosquito net at night--she in the middle, Hung-nien and Ming-shen on either side. At that time Ming-shen was just old enough to start walking. She re-



membered that after weaning, in the middle of the night, he would still search for her breasts with his mouth and his little hands.

It was true that Ming-shen had always been there to bring sunshine into her life, though her marriage with Hung-nien was an unhappy one. He was an adorable child. Every evening after he returned home, he used to tell her about his day in school. He would sing to her, recite to her, and even help her with the housework. Yet he had to grow up. After he went to high school, he no longer kept her company as before. She did not mind. She knew it was an essential stage that a child must go through in order to grow up.

But this Kei-yuen was a different matter. Bitterness swept over her as she imagined that he might have already been seriously interested in the girl, or even might be in love with her. Ah, youth was weak.

After she finished making the bed, Tun-chih went back to her own room. Sitting at the dressing table, she started rubbing her face and neck with lotion. She had been very careful to take care of her skin, but wrinkles still invaded her face, and they became more sharply etched daily. At only forty-two she had had a lot of gray hair already. Tun-chih frowned in the mirror. A thought suddenly crossed her mind: she wanted to see how she looked with long hair. She untied the bun and let her hair down over her shoulders. Seeing that long-haired ugly creature in the mirror, Tun-chih could not help but shiver. Hurriedly she took her hair and made it into a bun again.

Tun-chih heard the door open; Ming-shen had just returned home. She did not move, expecting him to come to see her. Five minutes passed;

he did not come. She stood up and walked to the living room quietly.

He was in his room; the door was half-open. She heard him pacing back and forth inside. She started toward his room but changed her mind suddenly and returned to sit in the living room, waiting patiently for him to come to her.

Ten more minutes passed, and he was still in his room pacing back and forth.

"Ming-shen," she called.

The sound of footsteps stopped.

"Yeh? I just got back," he answered.

"Can you come over here for a minute?" she said. "Come and talk to me for a while."

He opened the door and sat down on the sofa opposite her. He looked very depressed.

"How was your violin lesson?" she asked. "What did Mr. Ma say?"

He shrugged. "He asked me to practice it again," he said. "Mr. Ma was very mad. He told me I don't have any talent at all."

"Oh, he wasn't serious," she said, feeling sorry for him.

"He was serious," he replied. After pausing for a moment, he proceeded, "I want to give it up."

"Oh, Ming-shen," she said gently, "you're just saying that."

He frowned and said, "I really mean it."

"How could you do that?" she said, intending to get him to change his mind. "You've practiced it for almost a whole year already."

"I don't want to go on with it any more," he argued. His voice

showed that he was annoyed, which hurt her.

"So you don't. But you don't need to take it out on me," she said.

Ming-shen did not answer. He lowered his head and started rubbing his hands together. He looked very upset.

"You are just in a bad mood. I understand it," she said sympathetically.

"But Mom, I am really not interested in the violin any more."

"Not interested in the violin any more?" she said. Her heart filled with sorrow. "I'd like to know then what you've really been interested in."

Frowning, he did not answer. Both were silent for a while, and he kept rubbing his hands together nervously. She noticed again how delicate his hands were, with long and slim fingers and nicely shaped finger nails. Actually they were more like a girl's hands.

"Ming-shen," she sighed, "your mother is old."

"No," he answered, "you're not old."

"I know I am old," she said sadly. "I have become old and ugly."

"No, you are not old." His head remained bowed.

"Ming-shen," she said, "you must dislike an old and ugly mother like me, right?"

"No," he said, "why would I?"

She gazed at him tenderly. He had really grown up to be a handsome young man. His face might appear a little too square, but with well-defined features he was still good looking. His hair was soft and easy to comb; his beard was so sparse that he had to shave only once a week.

"Oh, he is so young, so young.....," she thought.

"You really think she is pretty, don't you?" asked Tun-chih.

He looked up. "What? Who?"

"Kei-yuen," she said. "You think she is pretty, don't you?"

Looking away, he said, "Mother, why do you ask? You've seen her and know what she looks like."

"Sure I do," she said pointedly. "I think short hair would go better with her face. What do you think? I heard that a lot of prostitutes wear their hair long."

There was a look of irritation on his face, but he did not reply.

"I can't stand this any more," Tun-chih thought. "And I'm not going to be kept in the dark." She was determined to make him understand this. She had to do something lest the girl should take advantage of her. Tun-chih really disliked the girl. Kei-yuen tried to take her son away from her sneakily because she knew that openly she could not challenge his mother.

But what about Ming-shen? What was his position? And how did he feel? Why had he become so withdrawn and silent? Deep down in her heart Tun-chih truly believed that he loved his mother, but was he able to resist the temptation this girl offered? She could not help worrying for him and fearing for him.

"She keeps pursuing you, right?" she said.

Blushing, he answered without looking at her, "No, it's nothing of the kind."

"Come on," she said, "why don't you tell me the truth? I know her

type."

"Nothing like that," he repeated.

She looked at him severely.

"So you both are willing participants then? And you have already fallen into her trap."

He glanced at her angrily. His lips moved as if he had been about to say something, but he did not. He got up instead.

"Don't go away," she said. Her voice sounded sullen and threatening. He shrugged and sat down again.

"Why didn't you tell me that you went to New Park with her?" she said sarcastically.

He looked surprised.

"I saw a line of the letter you were reading," she explained.

"What did she say to you in the Park? Did she reveal to you her secret, that she loves you?"

"Please Mother, don't," he said, with obvious hurt on his face.

"Please don't treat me like this."

Suddenly Tun-chih released all the sorrow she had kept inside her.

"I didn't realize that you disliked me this much," she said stinging. "And why do you act so depressed? Aren't you proud that the girl loves you? Why do you pretend to be so unhappy? Do you think it makes me feel any better?" She sneered at him. "Please don't treat me like this," she mimicked him and sneered again. All of a sudden tears trickled down her cheeks and her sneering became crying.

"Oh, Ming-shen, you just wish that I would die sooner."

"Mother, don't, please don't be like this," he begged. "I have suffered enough."

Wiping away her tears, she saw him holding his head in his hands. Then he bit his lower lip as if he had been struggling against something.

"You suffer? Can I make you suffer? Do you know what it means to suffer?"

He stayed silent.

Tun-chih sighed and shook her head slowly. She calmed down gradually, but the feeling of sorrow still hovered over her. "So, it's painful for him, too," thought she. "But why? For his failure to devise a way to keep his 'secret' from me? Because he doesn't know how to deal with his old mother?" Whatever the reason was, just to think that he was upset because of her made her feel somewhat better. It proved that at least he had a conscience, that he knew he should not desert her or hurt her.

Yet how could she be satisfied with this kind of love based upon "obligation" or "the sense of duty"? She wanted him to return the same kind of love she gave him--the kind of love that was self-initiated and unconditional. It was not that she wanted to possess him; on the contrary, she hoped that he could have a happy marriage. But she certainly did not want a daughter-in-law like Kei-yuen, not under any circumstances. She already pictured the type of girl that his wife should be, gentle, modest and with short hair. The three of them would live together peacefully, and she would be willing to cook and clean the house for them. She believed that she would love his wife as much as she loved him.

"You're not thinking of getting married now, are you?" she asked.

"Me? Getting married?" he grimaced. "I don't think I'll ever get married."

"Oh, Ming-shen!"

"Mom," he said hesitantly, "would you mind if I don't get married? Would it bother you very much if I never get married?"

A smile blossomed on her face.

"Oh, you silly boy," she sighed. "I certainly would, and I won't let you do it." She felt warm all over and was suddenly happy. "Ming-shen, don't say silly things," she said and looked at her son lovingly. But immediately she noticed that he was very unhappy. He stared at the floor, scowling and depressed. Tun-chih suddenly felt a wave of self-reproach coming over her. She went and sat down next to him, putting her arms around his shoulders tenderly. A drop of tears came down his cheek, falling on one of his pant legs.

"Ming-shen, oh, Ming-shen," she whispered gently, holding him tighter.

Suddenly his tears poured out in streams, and his body was shaking from his sobs. He covered his mouth with his fist, then bit his hand so as not to cry out. Silent, she continued to hold him and patted his shoulders lightly. After about two minutes, Ming-shen calmed down. He wiped away his tears and put his hands on her lap. She saw the deep teeth marks on his hand.

"Mother, you don't understand; you got it all wrong," he said.

"What did I get wrong?" she asked gently and kept patting his

shoulder.

"She doesn't love me; she doesn't love me at all."

"What?"

"Kei-yuen has never loved me; she doesn't love me even an iota."

Tun-chih stared at her son suspiciously. For a while she could not understand what it was all about. Sitting dispiritedly with his hands on her lap, he seemed so pitiful and helpless. He was almost twenty but still seemed so weak and helpless. What did he say? What did he really want?... "He hid the letter somewhere so that I could not find it, and has suddenly lost interest in playing the violin for no reason. He said that he is not going to get married, yet he complained that Kei-yuen doesn't love him... What's all this about?"

"So, you do love her," she said. Her voice was dry and harsh.

A bitter smile flashed over his face again.

"What difference does it make?" he replied.

"It surely makes a big difference," she thought. So his "grief" had nothing to do with her. He suffered only because Kei-yuen did not love him, and that was also the reason why he did not want to get married. He had never appreciated his mother's love. While she loved him, protected him, and even suffered from the fear of losing him, he thought only of Kei-yuen. Furthermore, he hid the letters so that his mother could not interfere with his feelings.

"Selfish child. You are so cruel that you would not even let your own mother share your sorrow," she thought. "But all this may be only due to his pride; who knows? Nineteen years old boys have their own



vanity."

Now she understood the reason for his recent depression. It was caused not by emotional conflicts. His problem was not having to choose between his mother and the girl. He was hurt by unreciprocated love and used silence to cover up his injured pride.

So, Kei-yuen had never loved him. This was really difficult to believe. It was the first time she realized that he was merely an ordinary boy, so ordinary that even a girl like Kei-yuen would not love him. She had always believed that all the beautiful girls in the world would compete to attract him. That was why she had been so careful to make sure that he would not be taken away from her. But now, she saw that he belonged to her only. There was no one in this world who had ever attempted to take him away from her.

This realization did not please her at all. On the contrary, she felt as if she had been fooled. He had never disappointed her like this. Stangely, she suddenly stopped despising Kei-yuen. She wanted to hug her and stroke her beautiful, long black hair.

"Actually, I knew for a long time that I am not good enough for her," he said.

Tun-chih said nothing. She shook her head sadly.

"I feel in love with her the moment I first laid my eyes upon her," he said with sorrow. "But it was only about three weeks ago when I finally gathered enough courage to tell her. She rejected me right away."

"She wrote you for the same reason?"

Ming-shen nodded. "That was her answer to the letter I wrote her

a few days ago," he explained. "She asked me to forget her and not to see her any more. She said she was writing me for the last time."

He looked up at her. "Do you want to read that letter?" he asked.

"No, I don't," she said disgustedly and started again to pat him on the shoulder mechanically. He was still her son, her only son. She still loved him and was happy to help and support him as before. Like all mothers she would always open her arms to embrace her child who got lost. But she felt in her heart something was lost forever. She could not tell exactly what it was, but she did know that her sense of loss was immense and boundless.

He slid down on the floor abruptly from the chair and buried his face on her laps.

"Oh, Mother, I feel so lonely. No one cares about me, except you," he moaned.

She gave a deep sigh and lovingly held his head in her hands.

Two hours later Tun-chih quietly opened his door and walked in. After turning on the light, she went softly to the bed where he was already fast asleep. He looked peaceful and relaxed.

"Youth is so full of resilience," she thought with marvel and envy. The young did not know how lucky they were to be able to forget everything in their sleep. No matter how sensitive they were when they got hurt, their sorrow and pain would leave them for seven or eight hours like a miracle, giving their tired mind a rest and allowing them enough time to recover. The only residue of their sorrow would be the two half-dried tear spots on the pillow.

She bent to pull the blanket up to his chin and immediately remembered that she had done the same thing for a man a long, long time ago. "Hung-nien..." the name echoed in her mind. The name had faded from her memory. She wondered why she had thought of it twice in the span of a few hours. She began to miss him earnestly and wished he had been still alive so that he could stand closely by her to give her some comfort. She would not feel so lonely if he had been there. Yet it was all too late. He was no longer in this world to accept her forgiveness.

She remained there for a while, gazing at the sleeping young man in the bed. Then, after turning off the lamp, she walked out of the room and closed the door silently. Bearing the heavy burden of her years, she walked back to her own room.

## THE END OF AN AMERICAN DREAM

## A Letter to Mother

Dear Mom,

I have received all five of the letters you wrote to me last month. I wasn't ill, nor was there anything wrong. I was just too busy during the day, and it wasn't till night when I went to bed that I saw your letters piling up beside the bed. But I was too tired to write. So this letter just sat here for days, till now. Please don't worry if you don't receive my letters in the future.

You mentioned in your letters that you have been suffering from insomnia lately, and that your blood pressure went up to 180. This must have been caused by all of your worrying and imagining. With your living alone in Taipei, if you get sick because you don't take good care of yourself, I won't be able to fly back to look after you. Doesn't this only add to my problems here, when I am in a foreign country? If you are suffering so much from worrying about me, why did you have to get yourself in debt just to send me abroad in the first place? Why, I am already twenty-five years old. Aren't I old enough to look after myself? Mom, you're wasting your time worrying so much about me.

Enclosed is a check for five hundred dollars. You should take three hundred dollars out of that and return it to my aunt immediately. This, plus the five hundred dollars I sent you last time, should be enough to pay off our debts. The remaining two hundred dollars is for your personal needs. Since this is the first time I've been able to earn money to send to you, I want you to spend it freely. Don't value the money

I've earned to the extent that you won't spend it on yourself.

Mom, you used to complain about Fate's not giving you a son to provide for your old age. But, you see, daughters can earn money just as well. To tell you the truth, Mom, I have intended to earn money for you since I was still a child.

Once when I was ten, you took me to my aunt's place in Taipei. It seems to me that it was my aunt's birthday, and all her friends, wives of high-ranking officials, came. You played mahjong<sup>1</sup> with them and were losing badly. I was watching you all that time. When you had to pay up the loss, you drew my aunt aside to borrow money from her. I felt so bad that I was about to cry when I saw your humble manner in front of her. I couldn't forgive you then. Our family fortune had declined and was nothing compared to hers; I couldn't understand why you still had to go to her place to socialize and spend a lot of money on playing mahjong with those rich friends of hers. When Dad was alive, his rank was even higher than my uncle's, and you were an elegant lady, too. Why did you have to humiliate yourself in front of her? I hated your vanity and lack of will power then. Yet in these few years abroad, gradually I have come to understand your feelings. If you didn't go to my aunt's place, where else could you go? You were accustomed to the nice easy life in Shanghai; and I know that you never forgot the good old days. Perhaps only in her house

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<sup>1</sup>Mahjong: a kind of Chinese social gambling.

with all its luxury, its Chinese operas and mahjong, and those rich friends of hers, could you forget your problems temporarily and relive your past.

One day, some friends took me to a rich residential area in Westchester, New York. While strolling by this villa, I suddenly stopped-- there was this splendid mansion with a large garden, that had a white iron arbor with clusters of grapes hanging down from it. The gate was open, so I just couldn't help walking into the arbor where the bundles of gorgeous dark-green grapes hung. I sat down alone on a stone stool under the arbor and was totally taken in by the scene till a big collie came and frightened me away. I couldn't figure out why the villa attracted me so much. After I got home, I suddenly thought of our French-styled house on Hsia-fei Road in Shanghai. Mom, don't you remember there was a grape arbor in the garden too? When I was little, I used to love to climb up the arbor to pick grapes. I still remember once being stung by a bee. My nose was all swollen. How old was I then? Five? You see, Mom, now I'd rather like you to go to my aunt's house often. This is also a selfish wish of mine. I know you are happy there. Besides, if you do happen to get sick, she'll be able to look after you. So it will help to relieve me of some worries.

In fact, the real reason why you are worrying so much about me is only because you are afraid that I may not be able to get used to New York and thus I may get depressed. How can this be possible? Everyone says that the United States is a paradise for the young. After living here just a few years, I have already fallen deeply in love with this

city. I have always loved big cities. And what other city has as many people and skyscrapers as New York? When I walk through Times Square with sunglasses on, getting pushed and shoved by the crowd, with those massive buildings going backwards one by one, I really feel small--like a drop in the bucket. Surrounded here by tens of millions of people, I feel that I am really free--the kind of freedom that allows me to come and go without being noticed. Sometimes an American would mistake me for a Japanese girl. I would just laugh and don't bother to deny. So they see me as a mysterious Oriental girl. Mom, isn't that funny? The best thing about being in New York is being able to forget gradually one's own status. Already I consider myself a hundred percent New Yorker. Actually, Mom, now I probably won't feel at home in any place in this world except New York.

I have a full-time job now and have already quit school. Mom, don't be shocked or unhappy about this. We both know that I have never been the type of person who does well in school. You told your friends that you sent me abroad to study, when actually you are hoping that I will find a husband, right? That's nothing to be ashamed of; that's the way it is with most girls. After two years of torture at New York University, I finally came to the conclusion that I should just enjoy myself here while I am still young. After all, the United States is a young people's paradise, right?

I like my job at the bar very much because the pay is very good. In this country making money is the great aim of life. I am proud of myself that I am able to make a living on my own--and Mom, you should

be proud of me too.

As for finding a husband, you really don't need to worry about me at all. I am not bad looking. I believe I have quite a few years left to lure guys yet. Last time you gave my adress and phone number to Mr. Wu's son and asked him to visit me. Please, Mom, don't do that any more. If you find a man for me in this way, I wouldn't want him no matter how nice he is. Besides, don't mention Szetue Ing any more in your letters. Our relationship was over a long time ago. I didn't tell you about it because I was afraid that you would try to find other matches for me. A year ago, Szetue Ing called me up from Boston to tell me that when he was ill in the campus hospital, he lost his head and had sex with an American nurse. He asked me if I would be willing to forgive him. If I would, he said, he would come to New York right away to marry me. I told him no, so he married the nurse. Mom, you know sometimes a girl is really serious about that kind of thing. On top of that, Szetue had been my first love since college. But first love is just like small-pox--after suffering from it once, you will be immune to it for the rest of your life. I feel much more relaxed, now that I don't have to be bothered by the problems of love. My life is easy and carefree.

Therefore, you really don't need to concern yourself about me. When I feel like getting married, I will find the right person by myself. If I get too old to attract men, I will certainly have you grab a man for me.

Please believe me, Mom, I am really enjoying myself in New York. Why, just last week I spent one hundred and eighty dollars to buy a



winter coat. It's an emerald-green camel-hair coat with a fur collar; it's light and warm. Mom, you would be tickled if you could see me in my new coat, moseying on down the street in the evening, with the complacent air of a young lady.

Christmas is coming. It's been extremely cold here in New York these past few days because of a snowstorm. This is the only thing about New York that I don't like. Winter is too long; there's so much mud and slush that my feet get filthy just from walking.

Have a Merry Christmas!

Love,

Your daughter, Feng-i

P.S. Don't send me any more Chinese canned food. I've quit making Chinese meals. They're too much trouble.

Lower East Side, New York

When it got darker, the snowstorm intensified. Near St. Mark's Plaza millions of snowflakes wove the dense neon lights into a colorful web of shiny pearls.

Huang Feng-i jumped out of a cab. With her hands covering her head, she ran into the Rendezvous basement on Sixth Street. The room was crowded with people, and in the pink light the milky white smoke permeated the whole place. Next to the piano stood a black woman wearing a silver long dress like a shining armor. She stretched her neck, and sadly but earnestly she sang in a shout, "Rescue me!"

After taking off her emerald-green coat and checking it into the

cloakroom, Huang Feng-i fought her way through the crowd to the counter and sat down on a stool.

"George," said Huang Feng-i snapping her fingers at a young bartender wearing a red vest and a black bow tie, "give me a light." She then took out a Pall Mall from a gold cigarette case, and put it in her mouth.

"Hi," said the young man, lighting her cigarette, "Barbara has been looking for you for quite a while."

"Oh, yeh?" Huang answered glibly. She laid her cigarette on an ashtray after taking a deep puff, and took out a compact from her purse. She opened it and examined herself in the mirror. She wore a short-sleeved, shining black Chinese dress which fit her exactly. On the collar there was a brilliant red coral pin shaped like a plum flower the size of a thumb. Her black hair, parted in the middle, hung straight down to her shoulders. Huang blinked her eyes vigorously, trying to shake the snowflakes off her thick false eyelashes.

"My dear," said a heavy woman walking up behind Huang, "you sure kept me waiting for a long time!" Taking hold of Huang's waist, she kissed her loudly and roughly. The fat woman was in a pink long evening gown. On her head stood a huge light-purple wig.

"Can't yah see," Huang answered without turning her head, "how hard the snow is coming down outside?" She was covering her lips with fresh lipstick, engrossed in each motion.

"Honey, but it's weekend night. You certainly don't want to miss this opportunity. Already all the fat ones have been picked by

other chicks." Holding Huang's waist with her arms, the fat woman whispered in Huang's ear, "But don't worry, baby; I save the best one for you tonight."

"Hell, forget it, Barbara." Huang threw off the woman's arms from her waist, and turning around, she snapped, "Last time you got me that damn son of a bitch from I don't know what hole----"

"You're an ungrateful little bitch!" Barbara pinched her cheek and laughed. "How come you got a hairless puppy into your room, then? Didn't I tell you 'the older, the better'? The sugar daddies in their forties or fifties are the sweetest. You wait and see!"

Before finishing talking, she hurried off. A short time after she returned with a middle-aged man. The man was tall, large-framed, and dressed in expensive clothes. From his coat pocket protruded a corner of a green handkerchief with white polka dots. On the little finger of his large hand was a gold ring, with a huge sapphire set in it. His silver white hair seemed to accent the redness of his chubby face.

"Sir," said Barbara as she introduced Huang, "this is our Mongolian Princess."

"Hello, Princess," said the middle-aged man, nodding to her with a smile.

"Why, Sir, ain't you going to buy our Princess a drink?"

Barbara winked to the man.

"What would you like, Princess?" The man carefully appraised Huang from her head down to her feet, with an approving smile on his

face.

"Bloody Mary."

Barbara and the man burst into roaring laughter.

"Ain't you afraid of blood?" the man teased as he stepped closer.

"I happen to be a vampire myself."

Barbara bellowed out with laughter so hard that she lost her breath.

The man choked, coughed, and laughed, covering his mouth with his hand.

With a rasping voice, he asked, "Is there such a beautiful vampire in the world?"

"George," Barbara waved her handkerchief to the bartender and shouted, "one Bloody Mary for our Princess, and a glass of whisky, straight, for our friend here."

"Right away, Boss." The bartender got the two drinks fixed immediately.

The middle-aged man handed the Bloody Mary to Huang and said, "Princess, allow me to pay my highest respects." He took a gulp. Then taking Huang's hand, he kissed it very gently.

Huang raised her head, took her glass, and with eyes half-closed, slowly downed the blood-red drink. Barbara clapped her hands and cheered.

When the bar was ready to close, the middle-aged man sat next to Huang and thrust his shiny, red, drunken face toward her. "Princess--" he said indistinctly and blinked his glossy eyes, then continued to whisper in her ear. Huang suddenly pushed him away. Tilting her head, she looked at him and giggled, "What are you so anxious for, Sugar?"

## NIXON'S PRESS CORPS

As soon as we arrived at school that morning, we heard the ear-piercing noise of the loud speaker. We wondered what was happening, and a teacher told us that the school just announced an urgent meeting for each department. When we heard it, we went directly to the big classroom which was used as the conference room of our department. At the door we found that it was already crowded with all the faculty and staff. In the first row, however, there were two people, Lao Ho, the chairman of the Departmental Revolution Committee, and Lao Diao, the representative of the Department's Workers' Publicity Corps. The former leaned and listened attentively to Lao Diao, who, with his head tilting and his triangular eyes half closed, was whispering in his ear. My husband and I joined our respective teaching groups as quietly as usual.

"What's the meeting for?" I asked a colleague next to me as soon as I sat down.

"They say it's for Nixon's press corps. It looks like they are really going to be here," the colleague answered quietly.

I was relieved. Leaning back comfortably in my seat, I waited at leisure for the meeting to begin. So long as it was not any political movement to persecute someone, it did not matter to me. Especially for this business about Nixon's visit we had been studying documents for three months to gradually break through our mental blocks, and we had already become accustomed to it. Naturally it was hard for people to change their concepts to accept the fact that we suddenly became friends

with the President of the American Imperialism, which had been our number one enemy for years. But after reading so many documents, people became used to thinking in terms of the words and phrases that they had read. No one had ever openly questioned the 180-degree change of this policy.

Yet, the Provinces and City Committees became very serious when they heard that Nixon's reporters might come to Nanking. To be well prepared for their visit, the neighborhood committees were ordered to study repeatedly the sample answers to questions that the reporters were likely to ask.

The noise of the loud speaker stopped abruptly. At the same moment everyone checked his watch. It was exactly eight o'clock.

Lao Ho stood up first and spoke to us, "Good morning, comrades! The purpose of our meeting today is to follow the order of the Provincial Revolution Committee to give a successful reception to Nixon's press corps which consists of eighty members who may visit Nanking for one day tomorrow. Today we are going to stop all our usual work to do a thorough clean-up, to spruce up the campus. All the lab instruments should be cleaned and stamped with Chinese-English labels. The foreign language teaching group should assist when necessary. The reporters will have only one day; therefore, the possibility of their visiting our school is very small. But, as Chairman Mao has taught us, 'never fight an unprepared war,' we still have to be prepared in every respect just in case. Now, Lao Diao of the Workers' Publicity Corps will talk to us."

Lao Diao stood up leisurely and turned around to glance fiercely

through the audience with his triangular eyes. He cleared his throat, and put his foot on the chair next to Lao Ho with his right elbow resting on the lifted knee. His left hand rested on his waist in an extremely relaxed manner. No one in the room dared to utter a sound. All eyes were fixed upon his foot on the chair. The worker class leads all. With this rampant gesture he struck the whole room with awe.

He first talked about how the international situation had changed in favor of the revolution, how the American Imperialism had come to its last legs, and forced Nixon to come and ask for favors. Then he repeated some policies and strategies and reminded us, "We must understand how these reporters operate. They like to go to many places, ask many questions, and take many pictures. But we have a way to deal with them too. We'll keep ourselves not too proud, not too polite, and always in a distance from them.... Thus, we can be sure to win the battle!"

Before finishing his speech, he suddenly raised his voice emphasizing, "Tomorrow, don't go out to the street unless it is for something important. Some of you should be particularly careful; better behave yourselves and be quiet!"

I was confused for a moment, but thinking it over, I felt his words explode like a bomb in my head. Flushing, I was too frightened to look around for fear that others might be watching me. There seemed to be stings on my back; I felt very uneasy in my seat. To accuse someone without naming him was a heinous way to work against him. If I should try to clear myself, it would seem that I felt guilty. Therefore, I had to accept it bitterly.

After the meeting, it was group discussion again. When our group leader went to ask for guidelines, Siao Wei, the news monger of our group, whose wife had arrived from Peking to visit him, told us some news. When Kissinger's car passed Chang-an Road on his second visit to Peking, a woman rushed forward attempting to stop the car to present him a petition. She was arrested by plain-clothes men, slapped with the charge of being a counter-revolutionist, and put in jail. Siao Wei said that her husband was a senior cadre who must have been purged in the Cultural Revolution and his wife was trying to appeal to Kissinger to reverse the verdict.

"It's so stupid," Siao Wei also added his personal comment. "She didn't have a chance; how can anyone get close to the foreign visitor just like that?"

It was only a rumor, and there was not any evidence to prove that the woman was originally an overseas Chinese or a student from abroad, but I became alert. As soon as the discussion began, I immediately declared that I would not go anywhere else except between home and the school, not even to the market to buy food, which I usually did in the mornings. Another rightist in the group also made the same promise. When we started cleaning after the discussion, the group leader came smiling to me. Patting my shoulder, she said, "Don't be suspicious, Siao Shin. Lao Diao didn't necessarily mean you." I forced a smile and said nothing.

My husband and I were both upset when we arrived home at noon. We cooked and ate our meal in silence.



"We're not going to the market tomorrow," I said. "Why don't you go and get some food before you go back to work."

He was surprised but then nodded. He put down his bowl and left with a basket.

I was too upset to clean the table. I just sat there staring dumbly till a knock on the door brought me back to my senses.

"Who is it?" I asked as I opened the door. It was Siao Miao, a member of the residential committee.

"Shin Lao-shih<sup>1</sup>, have you had lunch?"

"Yes, please come in," I answered and bent slightly to let her in. "What's up?"

"Yes," still standing in the door way, she started talking seriously. "Nixon's reporters are coming. We got an order to clean up our yard; all the weeds should be pulled, and no junk in the corner, and...." At this point she hesitated for a moment before she proceeded again, "All families must tear down the clotheshorses outside their window, because they may give the foreign guests a bad impression."

"Take down the clotheshorse?" I thought it was ridiculous, but I checked myself and tried to reason with her.

"Siao Miao, Nanking is a large city. There are lots of famous scenic spots and ancient remains. Besides, the reporters have only one day here. How can they have spare time for this secluded Ching-liang

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<sup>1</sup>Lao-shih means "teacher" literally and is used after the family name as a title.

mountain, let alone this Han-kuo Road. Even if they do pass here, they won't be able to see this building, not even if they stood on top of the car. They probably can't see the roof, not to say the window."

"But it's an order from the neighborhood committee," she said, frowning. Spreading out her hands to show that she could not help either, Siao Miao then said, "I just built mine over again last month and now I have to tear it down, too."

I could not advise her to resist the order. I just kept shaking my head in disagreement. Building our clotheshorse two years ago was a big job. My husband had to go all the way to Fu-tze Temple to purchase some bamboo rods. Wire was not sold in the market, so I asked one of my colleagues to sneak out some for me from the lab. It took us more than half a day to set up a three-lined clotheshorse outside our south window. It was strong enough to hold two blankets. Yet, for two years the wire had rusted from wind and rain. If we tore it down, it could never be built again.

"No," I insisted. "I promise you not to hang clothes outside tomorrow, but I can't tear it down. Because if I do, I won't be able to put it together again. And where shall we dry our clothes? Nixon's reporters are human beings too; they won't necessarily be surprised if they do see clotheshorses. If they are, this is the chance to try to change their concepts about such things, to educate them."

She could not think of a rebuttal and just grinned. Finally waving her hand, she said softly, "Well, I've told you." Then she left hurriedly.

When I came back from work in the afternoon, I saw all elderly people outside cleaning the yard. Some of them were sweeping the fallen leaves with brooms, and others squatting to pull the weeds. It was bitterly cold. Everyone, heavily dressed, moved as awkwardly as a penguin. I found that all the clotheshorses beside the windows of the building along the roadside had disappeared. Further inside the yard, most clotheshorses were also gone with only a few still being torn down. Every owner of the clotheshorse pulled a long face and worked in silence. After passing the third building, I could see in the distance that mine was still in its old shape. Other clotheshorses in the neighborhood were already torn down. My next door neighbor was taking down the last log. He broke it with a loud and clear sound and then tossed it on the ground without even giving it a second glance. In the dusk, mine became very conspicuous outside the bare windows of the second floor. As I watched it, my footsteps became heavier, but I could not tell whether it was caused by pride or fear.

Soon my husband came back with our child. He came in and said right away, "It's ridiculous! Just because someone said the clotheshorses must come down, they have all been torn down. I was just asked, 'You really are not going to tear it down?' I wish I could ask him why he did it. If everyone doesn't do it, what can they do?"

"You'd better keep quiet," I stopped him and took a look at our child.

My husband shut up immediately.

"Good boy, go inside and play. Mom will call you as soon as I

get supper done." I coaxed him to go to the south room.

After the child left, my husband followed me into the kitchen and asked, "What do you think? Should we tear it down or not?"

"Of course not!" I said angrily. "Just for Nixon they would rather slap their own face, and the whole country has already been messed up for two or three months. Now they even make such a big fuss just because his reporters might stop by here for one day, for which we don't even have the freedom to go out to the street. If they are afraid that the reporters might see me, frankly I don't even feel like lowering myself to see him, not even Nixon himself. Several years ago I saw him on TV running for the governor of California, and he was accused of bribery. He even brought out his dog to get sympathy from the voters. It was really disgusting. One of my American friends called him political garbage. We have been treated as second-class citizens because we came back from the USA. We don't dare to say nothing because we are scared, but the clotheshorse has no feelings. Let it stay there. The most they can do is to smash it."

Seeing me talking so excitedly, he said right away, "Forget it, so we won't tear it down. But don't think too much about it. You're just bringing yourself troubles. Why don't you start cooking, and I'll go downstairs to clean the yard."

Though my mind was made up, for some reason I was still troubled. I did a terrible job cooking the supper; rice was burnt, and the spinach was not done. My husband and I did not have any appetite for food or topics for conversation. We just ate hastily. Our innocent child was

talking by himself and eating with good appetite as usual.

After cleaning the dishes, I was about to pour water to wash my child's feet when I saw my husband rushing in nervously from the south room.

"Kao Sao is coming toward our building. I guess she is coming to see us. This is the woman I am really afraid of. Why don't you go and talk to her. If it is for the clotheshorse, don't argue with her. We'll just tear it down."

When I heard it was Kao Sao, my heart suddenly seemed to be suspending in the air. It never occurred to me that a clotheshorse would bring Chairman Kao to my place personally. This woman, born of good political background, was the chairwoman of our neighborhood committee of this dormitory area, and her husband was a worker member of the party. They lived in the information office and were in charge of the business of notifying the residents of messages since the college was established. She was under forty, but extremely competent and experienced in undertaking the class struggles and purges within the dormitories. She was particularly fierce when purging women and those who are weak or old. Relying upon her good background, she fearlessly kept producing "the red second generation" until she had six children. But on the occasions of promoting birth control or abortion, she would talk eloquently as if having one extra baby were a sin. Although she did not have much education, she was born with a mouth good at adopting phrases and quotations, plus her sharp voice and bitter words. No women could be her match, still less men. If women could hold up half of the sky,

she covered all of the sky in these dormitories.

"You just stay in the room and don't see her," I said and pushed him into the south room. After wiping my hands, I put on the child's shoes again and coaxed him into the room. Right after closing the door behind me, I heard the knocking.

I opened it. It was really Kao Sao.

"Shin Lao-shih, have you finished supper?"

The words were polite, but there was no smile on her face. Thus they sounded cold. Her triangular jaw was extremely sharp, and her thin eyebrows pressed above the two little protruding eyes which kept wandering up and down my body. With her hands behind her back, she looked cold and formidable.

"Yes, I have," I said. I blocked the door way and would not retreat though my heart beat faster and my breath became heavier.

"Is it for the clotheshorse?" Bravely I mentioned it first.

"Sure!" she admitted quickly. "Yours is the only one left in these dormitories. If you don't tear it down, we can't answer our superiors."

I repeated the reasons I gave during the day. Yet she was crafty. She refused to discuss the possibility of the reporters's stopping by Han-kuo Road, but kept emphasizing the importance of the revolutionary discipline and rhetorically quoting Chairman Mao's Quotations. Finally my refusal became a political problem. How could I accept easily such a heavy hat like a political problem?

Despite my anger, I calmed down. My heart no longer beat quickly



and my breath returned to normal.

"Chairman Kao," I said, "I don't think you should exaggerate things like this. After all, it's only a small clotheshorse, and my refusal is not without reason. We must take the important factors into consideration when we discuss a problem. I don't object to putting our best foot forward for the foreign guests. But the question is, 'Are clotheshorses bad?' Even in their own country many families dry their clothes in the backyard---"

She cut me off with a flick of her hand. "I don't know, nor care about what's going on in the United States. This is in China, and we have to do things in the Chinese way."

The refutation made me so embarrassed and irritated that I felt my cheeks begin to burn. Yet I could do nothing but listen to her shouting in a shrill voice.

At this moment our neighbor across the hall opened the door silently, and thrust out his head. He closed the door like a turtle retreating to its shell when he saw Kao Sao's back.

"No one knows whether the foreign guests will stop by or not. Even if they don't, tearing down a clotheshorse is only a small sacrifice for the revolution." To emphasize her words she raised her head high like an angry turkey.

"The state never calls for unnecessary sacrifice." My rejecting voice, in comparison with hers, sounded low and weak like a strand of spider web shivering in the wind.

"If the foreign guests do stop by, and only you keep a clothes-

horse, we, the cadres, will have to be responsible for failing to carry out the order thoroughly. Even if they don't come, what will people say? They'll say, 'So Shin Lao-shih has been right not to tear it down.' Then how do you think we should lead the people in this area afterwards?"

Her words added to my fury. I felt like pointing out her selfishness, but being aware of her power, I had to control myself. I was trembling with anger. My rage had been bottled up for whole day. Suddenly it caused a pain in my chest. My ribs seemed to press so tightly that I could hardly breathe. I put my hand on my chest and remembered my husband's advice, "Don't argue with her." I decided to give up. I was by no means her match.

"I won't do it." Although I could not raise my voice, I shook my head vigorously. "If it has to be done, do it yourself and get it back to the old shape as soon as the foreign guests leave tomorrow."

She was taken aback for a moment.

"How can I do it for you?" She changed her way of speaking immediately. "It has to be of people's own will to clean up the environment to welcome our foreign guests. The committee will never force you. If you don't tear it down, you should be responsible for it; and if something happens, don't say we haven't tried our best, or failed to fulfill our duty."

I had no energy left to answer. I only stared at her pulling her triangular-shaped face longer and sharper. Though her eyes were not triangular, the cold and conceitful stare looked exactly like that of Lao Diao's in my department.



"Okay."

After forcing out the word between her teeth, she immediately turned around and left, with her hands on the back and her head high. The hard plastic soles of her cloth shoes hit on the cement ground and made a series of dry, hard sound.

I closed the door. I did not sleep well that night, waking up several times for no reason.

The next day passed quietly. On the third day came the news that Nixon's reporters had no interest in Nanking and headed directly for Hanchow. Only two French reporters stopped by and walked around Hsin-gea Kao, and also rushed to Hangchow that night. Immediately, the sound of hammering could be heard in the neighborhood. But by the time Nixon had got back to the United States from China, the clotheshorses in our dormitories were still not all restored to their original shape.